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Oral history interview with JACK G. Cairl
[full name of interviewee]

Personnel - initial
about recruitment, astronaut selection, personnel
[main focus of interview]

Management Security issues, medical service

Title: 1962 - Personnel, PMA Branch, MSC
[interviewee's current and/or former title and affiliation]

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Interview conducted by Robert B. Merrifield
[interviewer's name/position]

Staff Historian at MSC
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Biographical - [date/place of birth; family background] _____

Education - _____

Career Path - 1961 - Space Task Group

Topics - nation-wide recruiting effort for engineering/
technical positions; ^{recruitment & evaluation in process} ~~second astronaut selection~~ ~~test pilot requirement~~ ~~astronauts and scientist astronauts~~;
National Academy of Sciences role in recruiting
scientist astronauts; ^{early days of} MSC Personnel Division;
high volume ^{technical & clerical} of applicants/interviews; high percentage
transfer from Langley (Virginia) & many later returned;
Houston Chamber of Commerce trips to Langley; security
issues ^{background checks} and career conditional appointments;
forced resignation process; ¹⁹⁶⁶ establishment
of Medical Research Operation Directorate;
problems with funding & facilities
utilization for medical effort

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Interview with Jack G. Cairl
September 9, 1968

121 I joined STG in July 1961. We had something in the neighborhood
of 400 to 500 people onboard. Burney Goodwin was the personnel
78 director at the time I was hired, and my entrance on duty coincided
with the arrival of Stu Clark, who became personnel director, and
Burney Goodwin was given the job of recruiting. There were only 2
people in personnel, he and John Vincent. Things were handled in a
very haphazard manner and continued to be handled that way for quite
80 awhile because the major problem we faced was building up the strength
of the Center. Everything else was set aside to devote attention to
hiring people. We went from 400 or 500 people up to our current
strength in an extremely rapid period of time. It was one of the
200 most extensive recruiting programs for any civilian agency. We acted
on our own to locate people any place in the country to fill largely
the technical and engineering type of job. We went to practically
every major city in the US, placed ads in the newspapers, and recruited
just as industry recruited. We set up nice accommodations in hotels
79 and motels and invited people through the newspaper ads to come
in for interviews. We took a team of engineers along with our
personnel people and we were making commitments right on the spot.
The aerospace technology announcement was new at that time and it was
the thing which enabled us to operate as we did, essentially as
industry operates with a minimum of regulatory paraphernalia. For 3 or 4
years this mode of operation was followed by the personnel office,
and all hands were turned toward the problem of filling jobs.

284 After I had been onboard about a year, we became involved in the astronaut selection program. This was the second astronaut selection program for the Agency. I was assigned administrative responsibility for managing the selection program. This I did for all subsequent astronaut selection programs, both the pilots and scientist programs, except for the first one and the last one. In the original selection program we dealt almost exclusively with the military agencies. We were looking for pilot astronauts as opposed to scientist astronauts, and we only accepted people who were test pilots as opposed to operational type pilots. There were very few civilians who were in the capacity of a test pilot, and in our first program we selected only 2 civilians, one of whom was Elliott See who was with General Electric and one Neil Armstrong who was with NASA Flight Research Center. We received outstanding cooperation from the military services. They each ran their own selection program and nominated to us those they felt were most qualified for our program. After receiving their nominations and after scouting the civilian population which we did through newspaper advertisements, contacts with the Airline Pilots Association, and the Society of Experimental Test Pilots, personal letters from Dr. Gilruth to all of the major aerospace industries and to all NASA Centers, we were able to find only a very few civilians who met the qualifications, but from them we were able to select two outstanding people. The Air Force had the majority of candidates as could be expected.

284 After an initial screening of about 500 people, we narrowed the list to 30-40 and these people we put through a very extensive medical and psychological evaluation, managed by our medical people at the Center

but ~~was~~ conducted by the Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine at Brooks. After going through this extensive physiological and psychological evaluation, they were brought to Houston, and utilizing the evaluative information from the School of Aerospace Medicine and the information we had developed from the people themselves, their flight, scientific, and engineering experience, and academic background plus a thorough evaluation by investigators furnished by the Civil Service Commission. CSC investigators did an evaluative type investigation. They interviewed from 30-50 people for each candidate, and the investigation looked into qualifications, personality, academic qualifications. These findings were furnished us in extensive narrative reports. Looking at those three things: the investigative material, the material furnished by the individuals, and the material which was developed by the School of Aerospace Medicine, we then interviewed each of the candidates extensively, to fill in gaps in information, and to confirm or refute doubtful aspects developed during investigation and evaluation. Thereby, we satisfied ourselves as to whether we felt the man would be able to function in the capacity of an astronaut in its broadest sense. We ranked the candidates and made our presentation of our recommendations first to Dr. Gilruth and then to Mr. Webb. The recommendations were approved and the 9 selected for the second group of astronauts.

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This pattern with some minor deviations was to be followed in the later astronaut selection efforts. On the next program, which was another pilot program, the only change we made was to do a greater amount of advertising. Then came the scientist program. It offered

unique problems in the selection process because we were now going to have to evaluate scientific capabilities more than pilot aptitude or engineering abilities. We asked for the help of the National Academy of Sciences. It set up a panel of experts selected by the National Academy of Sciences, ~~selected~~ from its own membership or people the Academy recognized as being experts in a particular area of life sciences or physical sciences. We asked them to evaluate all of the candidates and to provide us with a ranked evaluation of each of the individuals in terms of their scientific competence. Then we announced that we were proceeding with the scientist astronaut program. After receiving the applications, we turned them over to the National Academy of Sciences for review. The academy evaluated them and selected a small number who were felt to have the competence and stature that would warrant Academy endorsement. Only 15-20 out of several hundred met their criteria. They did not rank these for they felt them all of sufficient scientific competence that ranking was unnecessary. We then ran these people through essentially the same process used for the pilots. With the assumption that their scientific competence was not in question, we then evaluated only their aptitude for piloting both aircraft and spacecraft (nobody is simply a passenger on an Apollo Mission) and we evaluated personality. We had the same investigations conducted on these candidates that we did for the earlier group. Based upon these findings, some were eliminated for physiological reasons, some were eliminated because in their background personal problems showed up that might lessen their effectiveness in the program or while exposed to the public eye. We ended up with only six, and we almost immediately lost

one of those after the selection effort had been completed.

341 Thereafter we ran another pilot astronaut selection program essentially along the same lines as the earlier selection programs, only this time, as a combination of pilots and scientists. Interestingly enough we discovered that when we ran the pilot selection programs, although we were not looking for scientists, we ended up with men who had the ability to absorb tremendous amounts of information and for the most part, were of such caliber that they could be used on almost any type of program. They were not scientists from the standpoint of the Academy classification, but they were so intelligent and apt as students that they could be subjected to scientific training programs, and could absorb this type of information and be capable of making sophisticated judgments with a minimum of training.

342 One of the policy questions that came up during the selection of the first group of scientist astronauts which caused us to operate the second scientist astronaut program differently was the issue of a motivational type recruiting program. The National Academy of Sciences favored such an approach while NASA was opposed. In the first scientist astronaut program we merely made an announcement that we were accepting applications for scientist astronauts and gave a minimum of information. 388-2 The rationale behind this was that if people were not already motivated toward this type of activity, we felt there was considerable danger involved in a motivational recruiting program. We felt the only people we wanted were those who were interested in this type program, who were willing to devote the time and effort required to be an astronaut, and were willing to take the types of physical risks that are involved without

having to be "sold" on the program. The type we wanted would consider such an effort as an extension of their career as opposed to people whose career had been narrowly limited to a specialized discipline, but who lacked the motivation to devote time and effort to things outside of their discipline. To be an astronaut, they would have to learn to fly, they would have to learn the systems of a spacecraft, whereas their discipline orientation might be astronomy, geology, biochemistry. What we wanted was someone who combined an ability with a motivation that would motivate them to give up a lot of their time in the laboratory or at the bench, and to devote this time to the things they would need to learn. The Academy, on the other hand, felt that if we were going to get really top people, we were going to have to motivate them toward the space program, and convince them that the space program offered them an outlet for their scientific talent.

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The first program was run as a very low key program. In the second selection effort, the Academy point of view prevailed and NASA leadership was convinced that we had failed to reach the large number of outstanding scientists in the country through our approach. So we turned over to the Academy recruitment and recommendations to us of people designated as being of the caliber they wanted. They prepared a fine brochure and sent it to all the universities and wherever else they had contacts.

I do not know
Which point of view was right, ~~depends upon one's point of view~~. I presume only time will tell whether the second group will contribute the most to manned space flight programs or whether there is ^{anything to be gained} ~~relevance~~ in comparing them.

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The second program was directed by Warren North and all succeeding programs were directed by Deke Slayton. They ran the selection and for all

intentions and purposes had the final say on the selection . Gilruth and Webb served in the management loop for approval.

200 I arrived in Houston in February 1962. The personnel division was located in the Lane Wells Bldg and the Center was located in 4 or 5 scattered buildings. The Personnel Division later moved to the East End State Bank Bldg and by then the Center was located in about 15 different buildings throughout Houston. The combination of the tremendous response we got from the Houston community in terms of interest in the program and this dispersion of our people caused a tremendous amount of confusion, a tremendous increase in workload, and the problem of attempting to evaluate applicants. When we first arrived in Houston, we didn't have to beat bushes for applicants because they were just flooding in as an overflow from our original work in other cities and much more importantly as a response to the tremendous interest in MSC that was evidenced in Houston. There was literally an avalanche of applications. Girls were fighting each other to get to the door first for clerical jobs. Consequently, there were a lot of beauty queens selected as secretaries and typists during the early days. We had to contend with somewhere around 500 to 700 applicants a week. We were interviewing from morning until night, processing applications, and selecting people. The fact we had people spread all over the city plus this kind of workload combined to create a real morass. While there were a lot of outstanding selections made during this period of time, there were a lot, that had we been able to devote more time to evaluating the applicants, they would not have been made because we weren't able to get the type of performance data that we should have gotten. Overall, I think we were very successful in terms of getting good people, because

good qualified professionals were interested. We were fortunate in that several of the aerospace industries, LTV in Dallas, and several other companies on the West Coast were having some reduction at this time and we were able to hire a large number of their people.

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To cope with this workload, we divided the Personnel Division along the lines of a generalist concept. We established teams assigned to specific organizations that had to be built up in a hurry, and the teams would stay right with those organizations, learning their needs and trying to meet their requirements, coupling their knowledge of what was available with their knowledge of what was needed. Everyone who was at Langley with MSC was offered the opportunity to move to Houston. Those who didn't want to move were offered an opportunity to transfer to LRC. A very high percentage of the people with the STG elected to move to Houston, somewhere in the neighborhood of 85%. These people weren't the typical mobile types found in most organizations today. They were people who had roots in the Tidewater Virginia area. The attraction of the space program drew them to Houston initially, but once having arrived, many of them found that the pull to return to their former home was greater than the attraction of a Houston-based space program. Consequently many of them did leave, perhaps as many as 20-40% of those who originally came down returned. One of the unusual things was that not only did the engineers and administrative people move to Houston, but as well a great number of the clerical personnel. This helps account for a large share of those who ended up returning to Virginia.

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The Houston Chamber of Commerce did a great selling job after the announcement of the impending move to Houston. They sent people to Langley on two different occasions and made presentations and provided a tremendous amount of data on living in the Houston area. They probably oversold the area. It was true what they said about the cost of living in Houston in terms of housing, but the rest of the information was C of C type dope that you would expect from any C of C. Many people were disappointed when they looked over the pastures here where they would eventually be located. It didn't take long for the costs of housing and land in the Clear Lake area to jump after it was announced that the Center was to be built here.

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One of the things that was unique in recruiting was that we dealt very closely with the security people. Even though we were doing a lot of hiring fast, Security had a relationship with the Civil Service Commission which allowed us to give very prompt service in terms of investigative information on the people we hired. In this early period we were hiring people without benefit of a background investigation but immediately afterwards initiated a background investigation. As a consequence of the rapid hiring, these investigations often turned up a lot of data, which if known at the time of the selection, the applicant probably wouldn't have been selected. In some cases the situation was of such a nature that we couldn't keep the people on the rolls. When we were able to get the data quickly enough, and the applicant had been hired on a career conditional appointment, as opposed to a reinstatement or transfer, he was in a probationary status-and we were able to get rid of him without a great amount of paperwork and without a great lapse of time

or effort. However, because many agencies we hired from did not use background investigations, there were several instances in which the transferee was a career employee, and we had a more serious problem. In those cases, after the investigative report came in, we had to take action against an employee who had all the rights of tenure. Despite this difficulty, we were successful in removing individuals who we felt should be removed with one exception. The one instance in which we failed in our attempts to remove the employee, I'm not confident that we should have been pursuing the case in the first place, as there was serious doubt as to whether the offense was serious enough to warrant removal.

Generally, when the individual was presented with the facts, he resigned. We always had to be careful to stay within legal bounds. If we called a person and told him of the facts, we also told him that if he resigned we would still document his resignation to the effect that he resigned after being informed that something was wrong, whatever that something was. We did a very honest job of not forcing resignations--either resign or be removed. Most of them did take the option which was their own option to resign after being notified that we were going to pursue an adverse action. One case I recall, which is fairly representative, was where an individual had falsified his application. It was very carefully worded falsification. An investigation showed the man had actually been removed or had resigned from several jobs after being notified that he was to be fired. This was the most typical case for removing an employee. Other cases involved chronic alcoholism, unadmitted arrests for felonies, etc. The most sensitive and difficult

cases to handle were those in which people had involved themselves in unbecoming conduct. These were very difficult because there is subjective judgment involved, and in dealing with morals it is a question of who is interpreting them. The number of such cases experienced here was greater than I had experienced in previous agencies, but not significantly greater. We were fortunate that it wasn't considerably larger number of people that we had to remove. We did not take the time to do an adequate performance evaluation prior to selection and also one of the reasons is that many of these people who were removed had we not done a background investigation may very possibly never been removed from Federal service. Obviously the reason why there were as many as there were was because of the speed with which we did the hiring. The reason why there weren't more I think is because of the generally high quality of the people who were applying at this time. It was a high quality group.

311 The major reason why we had to establish a Medical Research Operations Directorate was that the medical effort was dispersed throughout the Center. The Center Medical Office, was largely responsible for operations and the Crew Systems Division was largely involved in biomedical research. With these two offices in the same Center working for different people, two different viewpoints emerged and left the Center, essentially uncoordinated from a professional medical standpoint which resulted in both embarrassment and confusion. This became the major argument for Dr. Berry to establish an organization at the directorate level which would have total medical responsibility for occupational health, medical operations, and medical research. The problem faced in establishing an

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383 organization at this point and time, 1966, about March was that billets were no longer free and available and space was limited because we weren't building new buildings. Now after $2\frac{1}{2}$ years, this organization still exists at its original billet level, almost at its original funding level, and still at its original utilization of facilities level. People are spread throughout the Center, the organization of 100 people is too small to carry out its assigned function effectively, it's located in some 5 different buildings--all of which makes for great problems in terms of prestige, economy, and effectiveness.